

PROJECT CENSORED

NEWS IGNORED BY THE CORPORATE MEDIA

These are the top 25 news stories of 2004–2005, as judged by Sonoma State University's Project Censored team, that received little or no coverage in the mainstream media in the USA.

Compiled by
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Sonoma State University
1801 East Cotati Avenue
Rohnert Park, CA 94928, USA
Telephone: +1 (707) 664 2500
Email: censored@sonoma.edu
Website:
<http://www.projectcensored.org>

Each year, the Project Censored team from Sonoma State University, California, selects and evaluates thousands of published news stories by journalists working in the national and international mainstream as well as alternative press. Students, faculty staff and community experts participate in this process, which ultimately decides on the top 25 stories that were the most underreported by the US corporate media. Following is an edited summary of Project Censored's selection for 2004–2005. To see the full report with references and updates, visit the web page http://www.projectcensored.org/censored_2006/index.htm.

— Editor

1. Bush Administration Moves to Eliminate Open Government

Throughout the 1980s, Project Censored highlighted a number of alarming reductions to government access and accountability. It tracked the small but systematic changes made to existing laws and the executive orders introduced. It now appears that these actions may have been little more than a prelude to the virtual lock-box against access that is being constructed around the current administration.

Changes are being made to laws that provide public access to US Federal records. The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) gives citizens the ability to file a request for specific information from a government agency and provides recourse in Federal Court if that agency fails to comply with FOIA requirements. Over the last two decades, beginning with President Reagan, this law has become increasingly diluted and circumvented by each succeeding administration.

Under the Bush Administration, agencies make extensive and arbitrary use of FOIA exemptions (such as those for classified information, privileged attorney-client documents and certain information compiled for law enforcement purposes) often inappropriately or with inadequate justification. Recent evidence shows agencies making frivolous (and sometimes ludicrous) exemption claims, abusing the deliberative process privilege, abusing the law enforcement exemption and withholding data on telephone service outages.

Quite commonly, the Bush Administration simply fails to respond to FOIA requests at all. Whether this is simply an inordinate delay or an unstated final refusal to respond to the request, the requesting party is never told. But the effect is the same: the public is denied access to the information.

The Bush Administration also engages in an aggressive policy of questioning, challenging and denying FOIA requesters' eligibility for fee waivers, using a variety of tactics. Measures include narrowing the definition of "representative of news media", claiming that information would not contribute to public understanding.

The Presidential Records Act ensures that after a president leaves office, the public will have full access to White House documents used to develop public policy. Under the law and an executive order by Reagan, the presumption has been that most documents would be released. However, President Bush issued an executive order that establishes a process that generally blocks the release of presidential papers.

The Bush Administration has dramatically increased the volume of government information concealed from public view. In a March 2003 executive order, President Bush expanded the use of the national security classification. The order eliminated the presumption of disclosure, postponed or avoided automatic declassification, protected foreign government information, reclassified some information, weakened the panel that decides to exempt documents from declassification and adjudicates classification challenges, and exempted vice presidential

records from mandatory declassification review.

The Bush Administration has also obtained unprecedented authority to conduct government operations in secret, with little or no judicial oversight. Under expanded law enforcement authority in the Patriot Act, the Justice Department can more easily use secret orders to obtain library and other private records, obtain "sneak-and-peek" warrants to conduct secret searches and conduct secret wiretaps.

In addition, the Bush Administration has used novel legal interpretations to expand its authority to detain, try and deport individuals in secret. Since the 9/11 attacks, the Bush Administration has asserted unprecedented authority to detain anyone whom the executive branch labels an "enemy combatant", indefinitely and secretly. It has authorized military trials that can be closed not only to the public but also to the defendants and their attorneys.

The Bush Administration has consistently refused to provide to members of Congress, the Government Accountability Office and congressional commissions the information necessary for meaningful investigation and review of the administration's activities.

(Source: *Common Dreams*, September 14, 2004, <http://www.commondreams.org>)

2. Media Coverage Fails on Iraq: Fallujah, War Crimes and the Civilian Death Toll

In April and November 2004, the United States conducted two major sieges against Fallujah, an Iraqi city of 300,000 people. The first attempted siege resulted in a defeat for Coalition forces. As a result, the US gave the citizens of Fallujah two choices prior to the second siege: leave the city or risk dying as enemy insurgents. Faced with this ultimatum, approximately 250,000 citizens, or 83 per cent of the population of Fallujah, fled the city.

The 50,000 citizens who either chose to remain in the city or who were unable to leave were trapped by Coalition forces and were cut off from food, water and medical supplies. The US military claimed that there were a few thousand enemy insurgents remaining among those who stayed in the city and conducted the invasion as if all the people remaining were enemy combatants.

Burhan Fasa'a, an Iraqi journalist, said Americans grew easily frustrated with Iraqis who could not speak English. "Americans did not have interpreters with them, so they entered houses and killed people because they didn't speak English..." Abu Hammad, a resident of Fallujah, told the Inter Press Service that he saw people attempt to swim across the Euphrates to escape the siege. "The Americans shot them with rifles from the shore. Even if some of them were holding a white flag or white clothes over their head to show they are not fighters, they were all shot." Furthermore, "even the wound[ed] people were killed. The Americans made announcements for people to come to one mosque if they wanted to leave Fallujah, and even the people who went there carrying white flags were killed." Former residents of Fallujah recall other tragic methods of killing the wounded. "I watched them [US Forces] roll over wounded people in the street with tanks... This happened so many times."

Preliminary estimates as of December 2004 revealed that at least 6,000 Iraqi citizens in Fallujah had been killed and one-third of the city had been destroyed.

According to David Walsh on the World Socialist Web Site, the American media also seems to contribute to the subversion of truth in Fallujah. Although, in many cases, journalists were prevented from

entering the city and were denied access to the wounded, corporate media showed little concern regarding their denied access. In the US press, we see casualties reported for Fallujah as follows: number of US soldiers dead, number of Iraqi soldiers dead, number of "guerrillas" or "insurgents" dead. Nowhere were the civilian casualties reported in the first weeks of the invasion. An accurate count of civilian casualties to date has yet to be published in the mainstream media.

In late October 2004, a peer-reviewed study was published in the British medical journal *The Lancet*, concluding that at least 100,000 civilians had been killed in Iraq since it was invaded by the United States-led coalition in March 2003. Researchers, headed by Dr Les Roberts of Johns Hopkins University, undertook a national survey to estimate mortality during the 14.6 months before the invasion (January 1, 2002, to March 18, 2003) and to compare it with the period from March 19, 2003 to the date of the interview, between September 8 and 20, 2004. Iraqi households were informed about the purpose of the survey, assured that their names would not be recorded and told that there would be no benefits or penalties for refusing or agreeing to participate.

According to the survey, the major public health problem in Iraq has been the violence. However, despite widespread Iraqi casualties, household interview data do not show evidence of widespread wrongdoing on the part of individual soldiers on the ground. Ninety-five per cent of reported killings (all attributed to US forces by interviewees) were caused by helicopter gunships, rockets or other forms of aerial weaponry.

The study's results promptly flooded through the worldwide media—everywhere except in the United States, where there was barely a whisper about

the study, followed by stark silence. The study was never mentioned on television news, and the truth remains unheard by those who may need to hear it most.

The US Government had no comment at the time and remains silent about Iraqi civilian deaths. "The only thing we keep track of is casualties for US troops and civilians," a Defense Department spokesman told *The Chronicle*.

The illegal, heavy-handed tactics practised by the US military in Iraq, as are evident in these news stories, have become what appears to be their standard operating procedure in occupied Iraq. Countless violations of international law and crimes against humanity occurred in Fallujah during the November 2004 massacre. Evidenced by the mass slaughtering of Iraqis and the use of illegal weaponry such as cluster bombs, napalm, uranium munitions and chemical weapons during the siege—when the entire city was declared a "free fire zone" by military leaders—the brutality of the US military has only increased throughout Iraq as the occupation drags on.

According to Iraqis inside the city, at least 60 per cent of Fallujah ended up being totally destroyed in the November siege, and eight months after the siege entire districts of the city remained without electricity or water. Israeli-style checkpoints were set up in the city, prohibiting anyone from entering who did not live inside the city. Non-embedded media were also not allowed in the city.

(Sources: *Peacework*, December 2004–January 2005; World Socialist Web Site, November 17, 2004; *The New Standard*, December 3, 2004; *The Lancet*, October 29, 2004; *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 4, 2005; FAIR, April 15, 2004)

"The Americans made announcements for people to come to one mosque if they wanted to leave Fallujah, and even the people who went there carrying white flags were killed."

3. Another Year of Distorted Elections and Coverage

Political analysts have long counted on exit polls to be a reliable predictor of actual vote counts. The unusual discrepancy between exit poll data and the actual vote count in the 2004 US election challenges that reliability. However, despite evidence of technological vulnerabilities in the voting system and a higher incidence of irregularities in swing states, this discrepancy was not scrutinised in the mainstream media. They simply parroted the partisan declarations of "sour grapes" and "let's move on" instead of providing any meaningful analysis of a highly controversial election.

The official vote count for the 2004 election showed that George W. Bush won by three million votes. But exit polls projected a victory margin of five million votes for John Kerry. This eight-million-vote discrepancy is much greater than the error margin. The overall margin of error should statistically have been under one per cent. But the official result deviated from the poll projections by more than five per cent—a statistical impossibility.

Edison Media Research and Mitofsky International, the two companies hired to do the polling for the Nation Election Pool (a consortium of the nation's five major broadcasters and the Associated Press), did not immediately provide an explanation for how this could have occurred. They waited until January 19, the eve of the inauguration. Also, the report shows that the discrepancy between the exit polls and the official count was considerably greater in the critical swing States.

In precincts that were at least 80 per cent for Bush, the average within-precinct error (WPE) was a whopping 10.0 per cent—the numerical difference between the exit poll predictions and the official count. Also, in Bush strongholds, Kerry received only about two-thirds of the votes predicted by exit polls. In Kerry strongholds, exit polls matched the official count almost exactly (an average WPE of 0.3). This exit poll data is a strong indicator of a corrupted election. But the case grows stronger if these exit poll discrepancies are interpreted in the context of more than 100,000 officially logged reports of irregularities and possible fraud during Election Day 2004.

In Franklin County, Ohio, Columbus voters faced one of the longest ballot lines in history. In many inner city precincts, voters sometimes had three-hour waits to get to the poll before being required to cast ballots within five minutes, as demanded by the Republican-run Board of Elections. Seventy-seven of the county's 2,866 voting machines malfunctioned on Election Day. One machine registered 4,258 votes for Bush in a precinct where only 638 people voted. At least 125 machines were held back at the opening of the polls, and another 68 were never deployed. While voters were rushed through the process, 29 per cent of the precincts had fewer voting machines than in the 2000 election despite a 25 per cent increase in turnout.

These problems point to an election that requires scrutiny. Even if the discrepancy between exit polls and actual vote counts is simply a fluke, other flaws and questionable practices in the voting process make one wonder whether or not the people's voice was actually heard and if we are truly a working democracy.

(Sources: *In These Times*, February 15, 2005, <http://www.inthesetimes.com>; *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, January 26, 2005)

4. Surveillance Society Quietly Moves In

On December 13, 2003, President Bush, with little fanfare and no mainstream media coverage, signed into law the controversial Intelligence Authorization Act while most of America toasted the victory of US forces in Iraq and Saddam Hussein's capture. None of the corporate press covered the signing of this legislation, which increases the funding for intelligence agencies, dramatically expands the definition of surveillable financial institutions and authorises the FBI to acquire private records of those individuals suspected of criminal activity without a judicial review. American civil liberties are once again under attack.

The "atmosphere of fear" generated by recent terrorist attacks, both foreign and domestic, provides administrations the support necessary to adopt stringent new legislation. In response to the September 11 attacks, new agencies, programs and bureaucracies have been created.

The Total Information Office is a branch of the US Department of Defense's Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA). It has a mission to "imagine, develop, apply, integrate, demonstrate and transition information technologies, components and prototype, closed-loop, information systems that will counter asymmetric threats by achieving total information awareness". Another intelligence-gathering agency, the Information Awareness Office, has a mission to gather as much information as possible about everyone in a centralised location for easy perusal by the US Government.

In November 2002, the *New York Times* reported that DARPA was developing a tracking system called "Total Information Awareness" (TIA), intended to detect terrorists through analysing troves of information. The system, developed under the direction of John Poindexter, then director of DARPA's Information Awareness Office, was envisioned to give law enforcement access to private data without suspicion of wrongdoing or a warrant.

The Total Information Awareness program's name was changed to "Terrorist Information Awareness" on May 20, 2003, ostensibly to clarify the program's intent to gather information on presumed terrorists

rather than compile dossiers on US citizens. Despite this name change, a Senate Defense Appropriations bill was passed unanimously on July 18, 2003, expressly denying any funding to Terrorist Information Awareness research.

In response, the Pentagon proposed the Multistate Anti-Terrorism Information Exchange (MATRIX), a program devised by long-time Bush family friend Hank Asher as a pilot effort to increase and enhance the exchange of sensitive terrorism and other criminal activity information between local, State and Federal law enforcement agencies.

The MATRIX, as devised by the Pentagon, is a State-run information-generating tool, thereby circumventing Congress's concern regarding the appropriation of Federal funds for the development of this controversial database. Although most states have refused to adopt these Orwellian strategies, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Connecticut and Florida jumped on the TIA bandwagon.

Yet somehow, after the apparent successful dismantling of TIA, the expressed concern by Representatives Mark Udall of Colorado,

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Betty McCollum of Minnesota, Ron Paul of Texas and Dennis Moore of Kansas, and heightened public awareness of the MATRIX, the Intelligence Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2004 was signed into law on December 13, 2003.

The Act expands the definition of a surveillable financial institution to include real estate agencies, insurance companies, travel agencies, Internet service providers, post offices, casinos and other businesses as well.

Due to massive corporate mergers and the acquisition of reams of newly acquired information, personal consumer data have been made readily available to any agency interested in obtaining it, both commercial and governmental.

According to an update from Anna Miranda of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), MATRIX was officially shut down on April 15, 2005. The program, which consisted of 13 states—and only had four states remaining prior to its closure—received \$12 million in funding from the Department of Justice and the Department of Homeland Security.

She notes that the tremendous explosion in surveillance-enabling technologies, combined with the ongoing weakening in legal restraints that protect our privacy, mean that we are drifting toward a surveillance society.

For instance, with the application of radio-frequency identification chips (RFIDs)—individualised computer chips capable of communicating with a receiving computer—consumer behaviour can literally be tracked from the point of purchase to the kitchen cupboard and can be monitored by all interested parties.

On May 10, 2005, President Bush secretly signed into law the Real ID Act, requiring states within the next three years to issue federally approved electronic identification cards. Attached as an amendment to an emergency spending bill funding troops in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Real ID Act was passed without the scrutiny and debate of Congress.

One of the main concerns about the electronic identification card is identity theft. The Act mandates the cards to have anti-counterfeiting measures, such as an electronically readable magnetic strip or RFID chip.

Privacy advocates argue that RFID chips can be read from "unauthorised" scanners, allowing third parties or the general public to gather and/or steal private information about an individual. The Real ID Act has given no consideration to this drawback.

Other privacy concerns regarding the electronic identification card is the use of information by third parties once they've scanned the cards and accessed the information. At this time, the Act does not specify what can be done with the information. A company or organisation scanning your identification card could potentially sell your personal information if strict guidelines on what to do with the information are not mandated.

Inability to conform over the next three years will leave US citizens and residents paralysed. Identification cards that do not meet the federally mandated standards will not be accepted as identification for travel, opening a bank account, receiving social security payments or obtaining government benefits, among other things.

(Sources: *Information Management Journal*, March/April 2004; *LiP Magazine*, Winter 2004, <http://www.lipmagazine.org>; *Capitol Hill Blue*, June 7, 2004; ACLU, <http://www.aclu.org>)

5. United States Uses Tsunami for Military Advantage

The tragic and devastating power of December 2004's Indian Ocean tsunami was plastered across the cover of practically every newspaper around the world for the better part of a month. At the same time that US aid was widely publicised domestically, the coinciding US military motives were virtually ignored by the press. While supplying aid (which, when compared proportionately to that of other, less wealthy countries, was an insulting pittance), the US simultaneously bolstered military alliances with regional powers in, and began expanding bases throughout, the Indian Ocean region. The US desire to curtail China's burgeoning economic and military might is contingent upon its control of this area.

During subsequent tsunami relief operations in the following months, writes Rahul Bedi in the *Irish Times*, the United States revived the Utapao military base in Thailand, which it had used during the Vietnam War, and plans to move Task Force 536 there to establish a forward positioning site for the US Air Force. It reactivated its military cooperation agreements with Thailand as well as the Visiting Forces Agreement with The Philippines.

US Navy vessels also utilised facilities in Singapore, in keeping with previous treaties. Further, the US Navy and marines arrived in Sri Lanka to bolster relief measures, despite the tsunami-hit island's initial reluctance to permit their entry.

The US also stepped up its survey of the Malacca Straits, over which China exercises considerable influence and through which 90 per cent of Japan's oil supplies pass. The United States has had trouble expanding its military influence in the region largely due to suspicions by Indonesia and Malaysia that the US is disguising imperial aims under the goal of waging war against terror. The two countries have opposed an American plan to tighten security in the vital Malacca Straits shipping lanes—a plan which might have involved US troops being stationed nearby.

The Bush Administration is reviving its hopes of normalising military ties with Indonesia, writes Jim Lobe for Inter Press

Service. The world's most populous Muslim nation, with its strategically located archipelago, critical sea lanes and historic distrust of China, has made it an ideal partner for containing Beijing.

According to Rahul Bedi, Washington has also long wanted a naval presence in Trincomalee, eastern Sri Lanka, or in Galle, further south, to shorten the supply chain from its major regional military base in Diego Garcia, which the British Indian Ocean Territory leased to the US in 1966 for 50 years. Diego Garcia's geostrategic location in the Indian Ocean and its full range of naval, military and communications facilities give it a critical role supporting the US Navy's forward presence in the North Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean region. However, because of the base's remoteness and the fact that the lease with Britain expires in 2016, the US is seeking an alternative location in the region.

Long before the tsunami struck, an article dated April 21, 2003, by Josy Joseph on Rediff.com, explained that a classified report commissioned by the United States Department of Defense expresses a desire for access to Indian bases and military infrastructures. The US Air Force specifically wants to establish bases in India.

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The report, entitled "Indo-US Military Relations: Expectations and Perceptions", was distributed amongst high-ranking US officials and a handful of senior members within the Indian Government. It refers to the Defense Department's desire to have "access closer to areas of instability".

Post-tsunami actions in the Indian Ocean illustrate the US intention to move this agenda forward sooner rather than later.

(Sources: *Jane's Foreign Report*, February 15, 2005, <http://frp.janes.com>; *The Irish Times*, February 8, 2005)

6. The Real Oil-for-Food Scam

The US has accused UN officials of corruption in the Iraq "oil-for-food" program. According to Joy Gordon in *Harper's Magazine* and former UN weapons inspector Scott Ritter in the UK *Independent*, the charge was actually an attempt to disguise and cover up long-term US Government complicity in this corruption.

Ritter says that "this posturing is nothing more than a hypocritical charade, designed to shift attention away from the debacle of George Bush's self-made quagmire in Iraq, and legitimise the invasion of Iraq by using Iraqi corruption, and not the now-missing weapons of mass destruction, as the excuse".

According to Gordon, the charges laid by the US [General] Accounting Office are bogus. There is plenty of evidence of corruption in the oil-for-food program, but the trail leads not to the United Nations but to the United States. "The fifteen members of the Security Council—of which the United States was by far the most influential—determined how income from oil proceeds would be handled, and what the funds could be used for."

Contrary to popular understanding, the Security Council is not the same thing as the UN. It is part of it, but operates mostly independently of the larger body. The UN's personnel "simply executed the program that was designed by the members of the Security Council".

The claim in the corporate media was that the UN allowed Saddam Hussein to steal billions of dollars from oil sales. If we look at who actually had control over the oil and whose hands held the money, a very different picture emerges. "If Hussein did indeed smuggle \$6 billion worth of oil in 'the richest rip-off in world history', he didn't do it with the complicity of the UN. He did it on the watch of the US Navy," claims Gordon.

Every monetary transaction was approved by the US through its dominant role on the Security Council. Ritter explains that "the Americans were able to authorise a \$1 bn exemption concerning the export of Iraqi oil for Jordan, as well as legitimise the billion-dollar illegal oil smuggling trade over the Turkish border". In another instance, a Russian oil company "...bought oil from Iraq under 'oil for food' at a heavy discount, and then sold it at full market value to primarily US companies, splitting the difference evenly with [the Russian company] and the Iraqis.

This US-sponsored deal resulted in profits of hundreds of millions of dollars for both the Russians and the Iraqis, outside the control of 'oil for food'. It has been estimated that 80 per cent of the oil illegally smuggled out of Iraq under 'oil for food' ended up in the United States."

(Sources: *Harper's*, December 2004, <http://www.harper.org/TheUNisUS.html>; *The Independent*, UK, December 12, 2004, CommonDreams.org)

7. Journalists Face Unprecedented Dangers

According to the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), 2004 was the deadliest year for reporters since 1980 when records began to be kept. Over a 12-month span, 129 media workers were killed; 49 of those deaths occurred in the Iraq conflict.

According to independent journalist Dahr Jamail, writing for Inter Press Service, journalists are increasingly being detained and threatened by the US-installed interim government in Iraq. When the only safety for a reporter is being embedded with the US military, the reported stories tend to have a positive spin. Non-embedded reporters suffer the great risk of being identified as enemy targets by the military.

The most blatant attack on journalists occurred the morning of April 8, 2003, when the US Third Infantry fired on the Palestine Hotel in Baghdad, killing cameramen José Couso and Taras Protsyuk and injuring three others. The hotel served as headquarters for some 100 reporters and other media workers. The Pentagon officials knew that the Palestine Hotel was full of journalists and had assured Associated Press that the US would not target the building.

According to Truthout, the US Army had refused to release the records of its investigation. The US Committee to Protect Journalists, created in 1981 to protect colleagues abroad from governments and others who have no use for free and independent media, filed suit under the Freedom of Information Act to force the army to release its results. The sanitised copy of the releasable results showed nothing more than a commander inquiry.

Unsatisfied with the US military's investigation, Reporters Without Borders (RWB), an international organisation

that works to improve the legal and physical safety of journalists worldwide, conducted its own investigation and gathered evidence from journalists in the Palestine Hotel at the time of the attacks. These were eyewitness accounts that the military neglected to include in its report. The RWB report also provided information disclosed by others embedded within the US Army, including the US soldiers and officers directly involved in the attack. The report stated that US officials first lied about what had happened during the Palestine Hotel attack and then, in an official statement four months later, exonerated the US Army from any mistake or error in judgement. The investigation found that the soldiers in the field did not know that the hotel was full of journalists.

Olga Rodriguez, a journalist present at the Palestine Hotel during the attack, stated on KPFA's *Democracy Now!* that the soldiers and tanks were present at the hotel 36 hours before the firing and that journalists had even communicated with the soldiers.

There have been several other unusual attacks on journalists. In all cases, little investigation has been conducted, no findings have been released and all soldiers involved have been exonerated.

(Sources: International Federation of Journalists media release, 18 January 2005, <http://www.ifj.org>; Inter Press Service, November 18, 2004; Truthout, February 28, 2005, <http://www.truthout.org>; *Democracy Now!*, March 23, 2005)

8. Iraqi Farmers Threatened by Bremer's Mandates

In his article "Adventure Capitalism", Greg Palast exposes the contents of a secret plan for "imposing a new regime of low taxes on big business, and quick sales of Iraq's banks and

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bridges—in fact, 'all state enterprises'—to foreign operators". This economy makeover plan, he claims, "goes boldly where no invasion plan has gone before". One of the goals is to impose intellectual property laws favourable to multinationals. Palast says this is likely "history's first military assault plan appended to a program for toughening the target nation's copyright laws".

Interviewed by Palast, Grover Norquist—the "*capo di capi* of the lobbyist army of the right"—makes the plan even more clear when he responds: "The right to trade, property rights, these things are not to be determined by some democratic election." No, these things were to be determined by the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). Before he left his position, CPA administrator Paul Bremer "issued exactly 100 orders that remade Iraq in the image of the Economy Plan". These orders effectively changed Iraqi law.

A good example of this business invasion involves agriculture. The details of this part of the "market make-over" are laid out in the *Grain* website article, "Iraq's New Patent Law: a declaration of war against farmers". Order 81 of the 100 is entitled "Patent, Industrial Design, Undisclosed Information, Integrated Circuits and Plant Variety". According to *Grain* staff writers, this order has "made it illegal for Iraqi farmers to re-use seeds harvested from new varieties registered under the law". Plant Variety Protection (PVP) "...is an intellectual property right or a kind of patent for plant varieties which gives an exclusive monopoly right on planting material to a plant breeder who claims to have discovered or developed a new variety. So the 'protection' in PVP has nothing to do with conservation, but refers to safeguarding of the commercial interests of private breeders (usually large corporations) claiming to have created the new plants".

Writing in *The Ecologist*, Jeremy Smith explains: "Under the guise of helping Iraq back on its feet, the US is setting out to re-engineer the country's traditional farming system into a US-style corporate agribusiness." In that traditional system, "97 per cent of Iraqi farmers used their own saved seed or bought seed from local markets".

Smith continues: "Unfortunately, this vital heritage and knowledge base is now believed lost, the victim of the current campaign and the many years of conflict that preceded it."

(Sources: TomPaine.com, October 26, 2004; *Grain*, October 2004, <http://www.grain.org>; *The Ecologist*, February 4, 2005)

9. Iran's New Oil Trading System Challenges US Dollar

The US media tell us that Iran may be the next target of US aggression. The anticipated excuse is Iran's alleged nuclear weapons program. William Clark, at GlobalResearch.ca, says that economic reasons may have more to do with US concerns over Iran than any weapons of mass destruction.

In mid-2003, Iran broke from tradition and began accepting euros as payment for its oil exports from its European Union and Asian customers. Saddam Hussein attempted a similar bold step back in 2000 and was met with a devastating reaction from the United States. Iran intends to set up an oil exchange (or bourse) in 2006 that would facilitate global trading of oil between industrialised and developing countries by pricing sales in the euro, or "petro-euro". To this end, it is creating a euro-denominated, Internet-based oil exchange system for global oil sales. This is a direct challenge to US-dollar supremacy in the global oil market. It is widely speculated that the US dollar has

been inflated for some time now because of the monopoly position of "petrodollars" in oil trades. With the level of national debt, the value of the dollar has been held artificially high compared to other currencies.

The vast majority of the world's oil is traded on the New York NYMEX (Mercantile Exchange) and the London IPE (International Petroleum Exchange). Both exchanges are owned by US corporations and transact oil trades in US currency. However, the euro has become a somewhat stronger and more stable trading medium than the US dollar in recent years. Perhaps this is why Russia, Venezuela and some members of OPEC have expressed interest in moving towards a petro-euro system for oil transactions. A shift away from US dollars to euros in the oil market would cause the demand for petrodollars to drop, perhaps causing the value of the dollar to plummet.

Clark warns that "a unilateral US military strike on Iran would further isolate the US Government, and it is conceivable that such an overt action could provoke other industrialized nations to abandon the dollar *en masse*". Perhaps the US planners think that they can corner the market in oil militarily. But from Clark's point of view, "a US intervention in Iran is likely to prove disastrous for the United States, making matters much worse regarding international terrorism, not to mention potential adverse effects on the US economy".

The more likely outcome of an Iran invasion would be that, just as in Iraq, Iranian oil exports would dry up, regardless of what currency they are denominated in, and China would be compelled to abandon the dollar and buy oil from Russia, likely in euros.

Clark points out: "World oil production is now flat out, and a major interruption would escalate oil prices to a level that would set off a global depression."

(Source: Centre for Research on Globalization, September 27, 2004, <http://www.globalresearch.ca>)

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10. Mountaintop Removal Destroys Ecosystems

Mountaintop removal (MTR) is a new form of coal mining in which companies dynamite the tops of mountains to collect the coal underneath. Multiple peaks are blown off and dumped onto highland watersheds, destroying entire mountain ranges. More than 1,000 miles of streams have been destroyed by this practice in West Virginia alone. MTR endangers and destroys entire communities with massive sediment dams and non-stop explosions.

According to Fred Mooney, an active member of the Mountain Faction of Katuah Earth First!: "MTR is an ecocidal mining practice in which greedy coal companies use millions of pounds of dynamite a day (three million pounds a day in southwest Virginia alone) to blow up entire mountain ranges in order to extract a small amount of coal." He goes on to say: "Then, as if that wasn't bad enough, they dump the waste into valleys and riverbeds. The combination of these elements effectively kills everything in the ecosystems."

The coal industry has coined many less-menacing names for mountaintop removal, such as cross-range mining, surface mining and others. But regardless of the euphemism, MTR remains among the most pernicious forms of mining ever conceived. Blasting mountaintops with dynamite is cheaper than hiring miners who belong to a union. More than 40,000 have been lost to MTR in West Virginia alone.

Ninety-three new coal plants are being planned for construction throughout the US. Demand for coal will increase as these new facilities are completed. Oil is starting to run out and there are no concrete plans for a transition to renewable resources such as wind and solar energy. Coal companies therefore will be well-positioned to capitalise on their growing market. Katuah Earth First! is one of several groups resisting MTR.

(Source: *EarthFirst!*, November–December 2004, <http://www.earthfirstjournal.org>)

11. Mental Screening Program Usurps Parental Rights

In April 2002, President Bush appointed a 22-member commission—the President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health—to "identify policies that could be implemented by Federal, State and local governments to maximize the utility of existing resources, improve coordination of treatments and services, and promote successful community integration for adults with a serious mental illness and children with a serious emotional disturbance". Members of this commission included physicians in the mental health field and at least one former employee (Robert N. Postlethwait) of pharmaceutical giant Ely Lilly and Co.

In July 2003, the commissioners published the results of their study. They found that mental health disorders often go undiagnosed, and recommended to the president that there should be more comprehensive screening for mental illnesses for people of all ages, including pre-school-age children. In accordance with their findings, the commission suggested that schools were in a "key position" to screen the 52 million students and six million adult employees of the nation's schools.

The commissioners also recommended linking the screenings with treatment and support and using the Texas Medication Algorithm Project (TMAP) as a model treatment system. TMAP, which was implemented in Texas's publicly funded mental health care system while George W. Bush was governor of Texas, is a disease management program that aids physicians in prescribing drugs to patients based on clinical history, background, symptoms and previous results. It was the first program in the United States aimed at establishing medication guidelines for treating mental health illnesses.

Critics of mental health screening and TMAP claim that these are a payoff to pharmcos. Many cite Allen Jones, a former employee of the Pennsylvania Office of the Inspector-General. He was fired when he revealed that many key officials who have influence over the medication plan in his state received monetary perks and benefits from pharmaceutical companies, which benefited from their drugs being in the medication algorithm.

TMAP also promotes the use of newer, more expensive antipsychotic drugs. Results of studies conducted in the United States and Great Britain found that using the older, more established antipsychotic drugs as a front-line treatment rather than the newer experimental drugs makes more sense. Under TMAP, the Ely Lilly drug olanzapine, a new atypical antipsychotic drug, is used as a first-line treatment rather than a more typical antipsychotic medication.

There are growing concerns that mental health screening could be used to label children whose attitudes, religious beliefs and political views conflict with established doctrine.

Perhaps it is because Ely Lilly has several ties to the Bush family, e.g., George Bush, Sr was once a member of the board of directors. Of Ely Lilly's \$1.6 million political contributions in 2000, 82 per cent went to Republicans and George W. Bush. In June 2002, George W. Bush appointed Ely Lilly CEO Sidney Taurel to a seat on the Homeland Security Advisory Council.

In November 2004, Congress appropriated \$20 million to implement the findings of the New Freedom Commission on Mental Health. Mandatory screening by schools for mental health illnesses would be included in the program. Congressman Ron Paul, R–Texas, introduced an amendment to the appropriations bill which would withhold funding for mandatory mental health screenings and require parental consent and notification. His amendment, however, was voted down by a wide margin (95 to 315 in the House of Representatives).

Paul, a doctor and long-time member of the American Association of Physicians and Surgeons (AAPS), warns that mental health screening could be used to label children whose attitudes, religious beliefs and political views conflict with established doctrine. He further warns that an obvious major beneficiary of this legislation is the pharmaceutical industry. The AAPS has decried this legislation, saying it will lead to mandatory psychological testing of every child in America without parental consent and "heap even more coercive pressure on parents to medicate children, with potentially dangerous side effects".

(Sources: *Asheville Global Report*, no. 284, June 24–30, 2004, <http://www.agnews.org>; *Truth News*, September 13, 2004)

12. US Military in Iraq Contracts Human Rights Violators

The US Government is contracting private firms to recruit, hire and train civilians to perform duties normally done by military personnel. These corporate employees are sent to fill empty positions as prison guards, military police and interrogators at US military bases worldwide, including Iraq, Afghanistan and Cuba.

Independent of the United States military, these employees are not held accountable by military law. Many of the recruits are citizens with prior experience as policemen or soldiers.

However, a number of the employees have backgrounds as mercenaries and soldiers who fought for repressive regimes throughout the world, such as in South Africa, Chile and Yugoslavia. Employees from some of these firms have recently been indicated in prisoner abuse at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq.

The Pentagon claims that it can no longer fight the war on terror without enlisting the help of private contractors. The reason for this inability is that the number of active troops in the United States military has dropped from 2.1 million to 1.4 million since the end of the Cold War. This puts a lot of pressure on companies to fill positions as quickly as possible. One negative consequence of this rushed hiring is the lack of in-depth background checks on applicants. Many recruits have been implicated in past human rights violations, including torture and killing.

(Sources: *Law.com*, May 11, 2004; *Mother Jones*, Nov/December 2004; *Corporate Watch*, March 7, 2005, <http://www.corpwatch.org>)

13. Rich Countries Fail to Live up to Global Pledges

Forty-five million children will needlessly die between now and the year 2015, reveals the Oxfam report, "Poor Are Paying the Price of Rich Countries' Failure". For Third World countries, economic growth is undermined by unfair trade rules. Without finance and support, these countries will not be able to take advantage of global trade and investment opportunities or protect basic human rights.

By offering 0.7 per cent of their gross national income, wealthy countries such as the USA, Germany, Japan and the UK could reduce poverty and end the burden of debt that makes low income countries pay up to US\$100 million per day to creditors. In the years 1960–65, wealthy countries spent on average 0.48 per cent of their combined national incomes on official development assistance, but by 2003 the proportion had dropped to 0.24 per cent.

For the US to spend merely 0.7 per cent of gross national income on humanitarian aid, this would be equivalent to one-fifth of its expenditure on defence and half of what it spends on domestic farm subsidies. The US, at just 0.14 per cent, is the least generous provider of aid in proportion to national income of any developed country. By comparison, Norway is the most generous provider at 0.92 per cent. The US is spending more than twice as much on the war in Iraq as it would cost to increase its aid budget to 0.7 per cent, and six times more on its military program.

(Sources: Oxfam press release, December 6, 2004; IPS, One World US, December 6, 2004, <http://us.oneworld.net>)

14. Corporations Win on Tort Reform; Justice Suffers

On February 18, 2005, President Bush signed into law the most sweeping federal tort reform measure in more than a decade. The Class Action Fairness Act puts into effect a tort reform that will take away people's access to the courts, undermining the constitutional right to trial by jury. These reforms weaken consumer and worker protections, denying due process of law in civil cases to all but the wealthiest in our society. The act will move many civil lawsuits from state to federal courts in an attempt to end so-called "forum shopping" by trial lawyers seeking districts most hospitable to multi-party suits against companies.

What has been lost in all the partisan rhetoric is the fact that class-action suits are most often lawsuits brought by people who have been hurt by HMO (Health Maintenance Organization) abuses, civil rights violations or workplace injuries and violations. These are the suits that allow for compensation when large numbers of people are hurt by companies in the pursuit of profit. Critics claim that the real intention of this law is to make sure these cases get buried quickly and are ultimately dismissed.

Attached to this bill is a mass-tort section that will severely restrict large class-action suits against pharmaceutical companies and paves the way for medical malpractice reform, effectively immunising abusive or negligent corporations from liability.

The new class-action restrictions give a virtual guarantee to banks, insurers, drug-makers and other big industries that, no matter how egregious their conduct, the penalty will always be financially manageable.

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(Sources: *Dollars and Sense*, no. 252, March/April 2004, <http://www.dollarsandsense.org/0304court.html>; *Democracy Now!*, February 4, 2005)

15. Conservative Plan to Override Academic Freedom

In his article "The New PC" in *The Nation*, Russell Jacoby addresses a new extremist conservative movement to bring what they say is "political balance" to higher education. These conservatives see academia as a hotbed of liberal activity that is working to indoctrinate America's youth with left-wing ideology; they cite studies that conclude that the faculty of most universities are overwhelmingly liberal. They fear that these liberal faculty members are abusing students who profess conservative belief systems, and to remedy this they are pushing for regulation of the academic world to monitor professors' expression of theory and opinion.

At the forefront of this movement is David Horowitz and his academic watchdog, Students for Academic Freedom (SAF). SAF counsels its student members that, when they come across an "abuse" such as controversial material in a course, they are to write down the date, class and name of the professor. They are advised to accumulate a list of incidents or quotes, obtain witnesses and lodge a complaint. Many in the academic world see these actions as a new McCarthyism—an effort to sniff out those who do not subscribe to the "dominant" belief structure of the nation.

Horowitz is also championing a "Student Bill of Rights". Ironically, this bill claims to protect academic freedom. But Jacoby warns that academic freedoms extended to students easily turn into the end of freedom for teachers. In Horowitz's society of rights, students would have the right to hear all sides of all subjects all the time. Principle no. 4 of Horowitz's bill states that curricula and reading lists "should reflect the uncertainty and unsettled character of all human knowledge" and provide "students with dissenting sources and viewpoints where appropriate". The bill does not, however, distinguish when or where dissenting viewpoints are, or are not, appropriate.

(Source: *The Nation*, April 4, 2005, <http://www.thenation.com>)

16. United States Plans for Hemispheric Integration

The USA and Canada have been sharing national information since the creation of NORAD (North American Aerospace Defense Command) in 1958. This bi-national agreement to provide aerospace warning and control for North America is scheduled to expire in May 2006.

In preparation for the renewal, the American and Canadian commanders are proposing to expand the integration of the two countries, including cooperation in the "Star Wars" program, cross-national integration of military command structures, immigration, law enforcement and intelligence gathering and sharing under the new title "NORTHCOM, US Northern Command".

Former Canadian prime minister Jean Chrétien refused to join NORTHCOM. To circumvent his decision, this "illusive transitional military body" (aka NORAD/NORTHCOM) formed an interim military authority in December 2002, called the Bi-national Planning Group (BPG). The command structure is fully integrated between NORAD, NORTHCOM and the BPG. The BPG is accountable to

neither the US Congress nor the Canadian House of Commons. The BPG is also scheduled to expire in May 2006—hence the push for Canada to join NORTHCOM.

NORTHCOM's jurisdiction, outlined by the US Department of Defense (DoD), includes all of Canada, Mexico, parts of the Caribbean, contiguous waters in the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, up to 500 miles of the Mexican, United States and Canadian coastlines as well as the Canadian Arctic.

Under NORTHCOM, Canada's military command structures would be subordinated to those of the Pentagon and the DoD. In December 2001, the Canadian government reached an agreement with the head of Homeland Security, Tom Ridge, entitled the "Canada-US Smart Border Declaration", which allows confidential information on Canadian citizens and residents to be handed over to the US Department of Homeland Security.

The BPG is the interim military for NORTHCOM. Part of the BPG's agenda is the Civil Assistance Plan (CAP), which supports the ongoing militarisation of the civilian law enforcement and judicial functions in both the USA and Canada. Military commanders would "provide bi-national military assistance to civil authorities". The United States military would have jurisdiction over Canadian territory from coast to coast, extending from the St Lawrence Valley to Parry Island in the Canadian Arctic.

It appears that some Canadian leaders are in full support of this program. In the summer of 2004, Canada agreed to amend the NORAD treaty to allow sharing satellite and radar data with the ballistic missile defence program based in Colorado, USA. This operation centre will control the 40 interceptor rockets planned for Alaska, California and at sea.

On February 22, 2005, at the NATO summit in Brussels, Canadian prime minister Paul Martin declared that his people would not participate in the controversial Missile Defense Shield program. Contradicting this message, Canada's ambassador to the US (and former board member of The Carlyle Group) Frank McKenna said: "We are part of it now."

On August 2, 2004, the US Air Force quietly published a new doctrine, "Counterspace Operations". Meantime, Canadian military personnel are taking part in large-scale American space war-games designed to prepare for combat in orbit.

Under an integrated North American Command, Canada would be forced to embrace Washington's pre-emptive military doctrine, including the use of nuclear warheads as a means of self-defence, which was ratified by the US Senate in December 2003.

Similar bi-national negotiations are being conducted with Mexico. The US military could exert strategic control over air space, land mass and contiguous territorial waters extending from the Yucatán Peninsula in southern Mexico to the Canadian Arctic, representing 12 per cent of the world's land mass.

The militarisation of South America under the Andean Trade Preference Act and a "parallel" military cooperation protocol signed by 27 countries of the Americas (the so-called Declaration of Manaus) is an integral part of the process of hemispheric integration (see story no. 17).

(Sources: Centre for Research on Globalization, November 23, 2004, <http://www.globalresearch.ca>; *Canadian Dimension Magazine*, January/February 2005, <http://www.canadiandimension.com/>)

17. United States Uses South American Military Bases to Expand Control of the Region

The United States has a military base in Manta, Ecuador—one of three military bases located in Latin America. The US Government says it is there to help the citizens of Manta, but an article by Michael Flynn in *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* says that many people tell a different story.

According to Miguel Moran, head of a group called Movimiento Tohalli which opposes the Manta military base:

"Manta is part of a broader US imperialist strategy aimed at exploiting the continent's natural resources, suppressing popular movements and ultimately invading neighboring Colombia."

Flynn reports that the military base in Ecuador is an "integral part of the US counterinsurgency strategy in Colombia—and is a potential staging-ground for direct American involvement in the conflict there". He adds that "Ecuadorians worry that the US could ultimately pull their country into conflict".

Flynn goes on to say that "the base is also at the center of a growing controversy regarding the US efforts to block mass emigration from Ecuador [to the US]".

According to a 10-year lease agreement between Ecuador and the United States, "US activities at the base are to be limited to counter-narcotics surveillance flights". Ecuadorian citizens are not pleased with the lease or the way the US has abused it.

The US, says Flynn, is intervening in Colombia through private corporations and organisations. Most of the military operations and the spraying of biochemical agents are contracted out to private firms and private armies.

In 2003, according to an article by Sohan Sharma and Surinder Kumarin in *Z Magazine*, the US State Department said "there are seventeen

primary contracting companies working in Colombia, initially receiving \$3.5 million".

One of these private American defence contractors, DynCorp, runs the military base at Manta.

"The Pentagon's decision to give DynCorp—a company that many Latin Americans closely associate with US activities in Colombia—the contract to administer the base reinforced fears that the United States had more than drug interdiction in mind when it set up shop in Manta," says Flynn.

In addition, say Sharma and Kumarin, DynCorp was awarded a "\$600 million contract to carry out aerial spraying to eliminate coca crops which also contaminates maize, yucca and plantains—staple foods of the population; children and adults develop skin rashes". The chemical—the foundation for the herbicide Roundup—is sprayed in Ecuador in a manner that would be illegal in the United States.

According to the November/December 2004 *Report* by NACLA (North American Congress on Latin America), in 2004 the Pentagon began installing three substitute logistics centres (now under construction) in the provinces of Guayas, Azuay and Sucumbíos, and is currently militarising the Ecuadorian police who are receiving "anti-terrorist" training by the FBI.

(Sources: *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, January/February 2005, <http://www.thebulletin.org>; *Z Net*, December 29, 2004, <http://www.zmag.org>; *NACLA Report on the Americas*, November/December 2004, <http://www.nacla.org>)

Under an integrated North American Command, Canada would be forced to embrace Washington's pre-emptive military doctrine, including the use of nuclear warheads as a means of self-defence, which was ratified by the US Senate in December 2003.

18. Stocks Fraud Could Weaken US Economy

The negligence of government regulatory agencies and the media is becoming worrisome as a major scandal, unknown outside the financial community, is bankrupting small businesses and investors and having a negative effect on the economy.

The scandal, coined "Stockgate" by the *Financial Wire*, involves the abuse of "short selling". As opposed to a traditional approach to investing in which stocks are researched and bought in the hope they will rise over the "long" term, going "short" involves a bet that a stock is about to go down in value.

The short sale of stocks is a risky bet, usually not recommended except for speculation or hedging, to protect long-term financial positions with short-term offsets. As short-selling is a sale of stocks not owned but lent it is an example of buying on margin—a category of practices whose abuses stand out clearly in many people's minds as a significant factor in the 1929 Stock Market Crash.

"Naked shorting" is an illegal abuse of short selling in which investors short-sell stock that they have no intention or ability ever to cover. When allowed to occur, naked shorting drives the stock value of a company down by creating more stock shares flowing around the market than actual shares of stock that the company can back with its current earnings. Companies, their shareholders and indeed the entire economy are hurt financially by naked shorting, as it reduces the money available to support economic growth.

Investors hurt by or concerned about the consequences of naked shorting organised, petitioned and investigated the background surrounding the Stockgate scandal. What they found was not merely a series of noteworthy cases of extravagant abuse by individual investors and professionals but a systemic pattern of negligence by regulators that allowed the abuse to go by largely unchecked.



While investors have lost hundreds of billions of dollars in savings, the Wall Street firms responsible for the abuse saw negligible fines that had no appreciable impact on their stock values. Some executives were even given raises in the midst of their negligence and fraud!

(Sources: *Financial Wire*, "Stockgate Today" Series, September 20, 2004 and April 7, 2005; *San Antonio Express-News*, March 2, 2005; TheMotleFool.com, March 30, 2005)

19. Child Wards Used in AIDS & Vaccine Experiments

Orphans as young as three months old were used as test subjects in AIDS drug trials in New York's Incarnation Children's Center. The Center, which is run by Catholic Charities, specialises in treating HIV sufferers, and the drug trials were performed on children with HIV or who were born to HIV-positive mothers. The New York City Health Department is looking into claims that more than 100 children at Incarnation were used in as many as 36 experiments. Most of these experiments were sponsored by Federal agencies such as the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases.

Documents obtained by the UK *Observer* have implicated British pharmaceutical giant GlaxoSmithKline's involvement in at least four experiments conducted at Incarnation since 1995 using black and Hispanic children. Several trials were conducted to test the toxicity of AIDS drugs. In one trial, children as young as four received a high-dosage cocktail of seven drugs; another tested the reaction of six-month-olds to a double dosage of a measles vaccine. Other studies conducted on children included testing AZT, which can have dangerous side effects, and testing the long-term safety of antibacterial drugs on six-month-old babies. GlaxoSmithKline also used children to "obtain tolerance, safety and pharmacokinetic data" for herpes drugs.

The Incarnation trials were conducted by Columbia University Medical Center doctors. A spokesperson for the university said that there have been no trials at Incarnation since 2000, and that the consent for using the children as test subjects was provided by the Administration for Children's Services. Consent was based upon decisions by a panel of doctors and lawyers who decided whether or not the benefits of allowing the child to receive the drugs outweighed the risks (it was unclear what recipient "benefits" referred to). Though GlaxoSmithKline has acknowledged its involvement in the trials, it denies any wrongdoing.

These trials at New York's Incarnation Children's Center were part of a broader series of HIV and AIDS drug trials that were conducted in at least seven states on foster children. Some children died during the trials. However, government officials have so far found no evidence that their deaths could be directly connected to the experiments.

(Sources: *The Observer*, UK, April 4, 2004; *Democracy Now!*, December 22, 2004, <http://www.democracynow.org>)

20. Native Americans Sue for Resources Compensation

Native Americans, after more than two centuries, are still being cheated by the US Government and US corporations. Oil companies operating at Montezuma Creek, Utah, which lies on a Navajo Reservation, have undercompensated the Native Americans for the right to their natural resources since the 1950s.

District Court-appointed investigator Alan Balaran discovered that non-Native Americans in the same area received royalties that amounted to more than 20 times the amount received by the Native Americans on the reservation. His findings show that the government owes Native Americans as much as \$137.5 billion in back royalties. The issue of the government keeping funds from

Native Americans dates back to the Dawes Act of 1887. The Act created a trust fund for Native Americans over the years, but since the 1950s the government has grossly mismanaged revenues from oil, timber and mineral leases on tribal land.

According to Elouise Cobell, a member of the Blackfeet tribe, many Native Americans depend on these royalty checks for the bare necessities. The Navajo Nation has more than 140,000 members and is the country's largest tribe. It is also one of the poorest. More than 40 per cent of its people live in poverty while the median household annual income is \$20,000, less than half of the national median.

In 1994, Congress passed the American Indian Trust Reform Act. This required the Interior Department to account for all the money in the trust fund and clean up the accounting process. The Individual Indian Monies case, also known as Cobell v. Norton, filed in 1996, is the largest class-action suit ever filed against the Federal government.

Elouise Cobell is at the centre of the suit that involves more than 100 years of revenues generated by government leases on Native American land held "in trust" for mining as well as oil and gas exploration. The defendant in the Cobell v. Norton case is Interior Department Secretary Gale Norton. She has been held in contempt by Federal Judge Royce C. Lamberth for ignoring his orders to account for the fund. Lamberth stated that he had never seen greater government incompetence than the Interior Department had shown in administrating the money and representing itself in court.

In early 2001, Alan Balaran made a surprise visit to the government's warehouse. There he found papers from a shredder, which had records concerning the money paid out of the trust fund. The Bureau of Indian Affairs, which is under the Interior Department, said similar documents were being shredded every day.

Judge Lamberth has ordered the government to complete an historical accounting for all funds in the case by January 6, 2008.

(Sources: *LiP Magazine*, Winter 2004; *News from Indian Country*, March 8, 2004)

21. Immigration Plan Favours Business over People

A bipartisan effort from the US Federal Government is emerging to close the borders with Mexico by increasing barriers that keep "illegal" immigrants from travelling to and from Mexico, and in turn creating a guest worker program with specific time limits for residency. Reminiscent of the defunct *bracero* program, the status of "guest worker" has reappeared as the preferred name for Mexican nationals working in the USA.

The leading organisation behind the guest worker legislation is the Essential Worker Immigration Coalition (EWIC), organised in 1999 while Bill Clinton was still president. The group quickly grew to include 36 of the country's most powerful employer associations, headed by the US Chamber of Commerce. The National Association of Chain Drug Stores (which includes Wal-Mart) belongs, as do the American Health Care Association, the American Hotel and Lodging Association, the National Council of Chain Restaurants, the National Restaurant Association, and the National Retail Federation. Each of these associations represents employers who depend on a workforce almost entirely without benefits and working at (or below) minimum wage.

Edward Kennedy (D) and John McCain (R) are promoting a bipartisan bill that would create the designation of "guest worker" for a

three-year period. About half a million workers would be eligible for the status if they are sponsored by American businesses and pay US\$500.

Because of the nature of the work being offered under this program, most guest workers will be left with little more than minimum wage employment. There are no benefits or health care offered under the new program. The \$2,000 price tag for uninvited potential guest workers means that most of over 10 million undocumented workers will be unwilling to come forth. There has been no serious discussion on Capitol Hill on realistically dealing with the undocumented worker situation because US corporations will continue to benefit from cheap labour sources from outside and inside US borders.

This proposal allows hard-working, tax-paying immigrants to become a legitimate part of the US economy, but it keeps them from fully participating in democracy—making immigrants a permanent sub-class of society.

(Sources: Interhemispheric Resource Center, November 16, 2004; *Washington Free Press*, November/December 2004; MotherJones.com, November 11, 2004)

Thousands of papers have come out touting different developments in nanoscience, but fewer than 50 have examined how engineered nanoparticles will affect people and the environment.

22. Nanotechnology's Health Effects Need Scrutiny

The science of nanotechnology is rapidly advancing, but there is little research to show whether or not nano-sized molecules are safe for people and the environment. Nanotechnology uses molecules that are virtually impossible

to see: one blood cell measures 7,000 nanometres in width.

The US Government spent close to \$1 billion in 2004 on nanotechnology research and development. However, only one per cent of it went towards research for risk assessment, despite the fact that nanotechnology also has the potential to cause harm to people and the environment. The nano-sized molecules can damage or kill the skin cells of humans and also kill valuable bacteria in water. The reason little money is given to research the risks is nanotechnology's huge upside: some estimates predict that the nanotech market will reach \$1 trillion in a decade.

Thousands of papers have come out touting different developments in nanoscience, but fewer than 50 have examined how engineered nanoparticles will affect people and the environment. The studies paint a grim picture for nanotechnology.

In the spring of 2004, Dr Eva Oberdorster, an adjunct scientist at Duke University, made headlines with potentially disturbing news about a highly praised nanoparticle called the "fullerene", named for the inventor R. Buckminster Fuller. The fullerene is made of 60 carbon atoms, bonded together like a molecular soccer ball. Dr Oberdorster put a solution of fullerenes into a tank with large-mouthed bass and later examined different organs in the fish. She found signs of oxidative damage in their brains and speculated that the nanoparticles had stimulated the production of free radicals—highly reactive compounds that can cause cellular damage. Dr Oberdorster's and other experiments show that nano-size particles can slip through the blood-brain barrier by travelling up nerve cells into the brain.

A survey by North Carolina State University found that public perception of nanotech remains fairly positive. As has happened with new technologies in the past, this optimism may become accusations and lawsuits if the side effects outweigh the benefits.

(Source: *Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 10, 2004)

23. The Plight of Palestinian Child Detainees

According to Catherine Cook, Adah Kay and Adam Hanieh in *Left Turn*, approximately 350 Palestinian children, aged 12 to 18, are being held in Israeli prisons. Over 2,000 children have been arrested since the beginning of the second Intifada, a Palestinian uprising against the Israeli occupation. This number corresponds with that given in a 2004 report by the human rights organisation Defense for Children International (DCI), which adds that another 170 children are held in military detention centres.

Looking at the testimonies from hundreds of detained children, Cook et al. found a pattern in the children's experience of arrest, interrogation, sentencing and prison conditions. These patterns of abuse are not just the actions of a few bad soldiers, but perhaps reveal a broader policy. Virtually every child interviewed describes a deliberate pattern of behaviour by Israeli soldiers or police characterised by violence, physical and psychological threats and overwhelming force, often in the middle of the night.

According to the DCI report: "In many areas, Israel does not reach the standards demanded by the minimum rules [of the UN Convention of the Rights of a Child]... In the territories, the situation is even worse."

(Sources: *Left Turn*, August 19, 2004, <http://www.leftturn.org>; Defence for Children International, <http://www.dci-pal.org>)

24. Ethiopian Indigenous Victims of Corporate and Government Resource Aspirations

According to Keith Harmon Snow (www.w4report.com), the US-based organisations Genocide Watch and Survivors' Rights International, after conducting field observations in January, released a conclusive report on February 25, 2004. It provides evidence that Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Defense Front (EPRDF) soldiers and "Highlander" militias in the Anuak territory of Ethiopia have killed thousands of native civilians. The Highlanders are predominantly Tigray and Amhara peoples who resettled in Anuak territory in 1974 and are on a quest to force the Anuak from the region. EPRDF soldiers and Highlander settlers initiated a campaign of massacres, repressions and mass rapes, deliberately targeting the Anuak minority.

Ethiopia is the latest US ally in the "War on Terror" to turn its back on its own indigenous peoples. The Anuak territory is a zone coveted by corporate interests for its oil and gold. According to Anuak sources relying on sympathetic oppositionists within the regime, the EPRDF plans to procure the petroleum of Gambella were laid out at a top-level cabinet meeting in Addis Ababa (the capital of Ethiopia) in September 2003. Prime Minister Meles Zenawi chaired the meeting, at which the militant ethnic cleansing of the Anuaks was reportedly openly discussed.

The killing of eight UN and Ethiopian Government officials, whose van was ambushed on December 13, 2003, marked the start of a coordinated military operation to systematically eliminate Anuaks. As of November 4, 2004, at least 1,500 and perhaps as many as 2,500 Anuak civilians have died in the fighting. Intellectuals, leaders, students and other educated classes have been intentionally targeted. Hundreds of people remain unaccounted for and many have mysteriously "disappeared".

In August 2003, the US committed \$28 million to international trade enhancements with Ethiopia. Beginning in July 2003, forces from the Pentagon's Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) held a three-month bilateral training exercise with Ethiopian forces at the Hurso Training Camp northwest of Dire Dawa. The US Army's 10th Mountain Division recently completed a three-month program to train an Ethiopian Army division in counterterrorism attacks. Operations are coordinated through the CJTF-HOA regional base in Djibouti, where the Halliburton subsidiary KBR is the prime contractor.

In 2000, Texas-based Sico Inc. signed a \$1.4 billion-dollar deal with Ethiopia for the "Gazoil" joint venture to exploit oil and gas in the southeast Ogaden Basin. Hunt Oil Company of Dallas, Texas, is also involved in the Ogaden Basin through the subsidiary Ethiopia Hunt Oil Company. Hunt Oil's chairman and CEO Ray L. Hunt is also a director of Halliburton.

(Source: *World War 4 Report*, issue 97, April 2004, <http://www.w4report.com.97.html>)

25. Homeland Security Designed to Fail

It was billed as America's frontline defence against terrorism, but badly underfunded, crippled by special interests and ignored by the White House, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has been relegated to bureaucratic obscurity. Unveiled on March 1, 2003, it had been touted as the Bush Administration's bold response to the new threats facing America in the post-Cold War world of global terrorism. It is currently composed of 22 formerly separate federal agencies and boasts 186,200 employees. Its operations are funded by a budget of nearly US\$27 billion.

There are 15,000 industrial plants in the US that produce toxic chemicals. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), about 100 of these could endanger up to a million lives with poisonous clouds of ammonia, chlorine or carbon disulphide that could be released over densely populated areas by a terrorist attack.

Following 9/11, there was a big push to increase security at all chemical plants in the United States. Democrats put forth a Chemical Security bill to codify parameters for site security, ensure safe transport of toxic materials and prevent accidents from happening. But Republicans defeated the bill after oil companies pumped millions of dollars into lobbying campaigns to stop it.

Matthew Brzezinski, in *Mother Jones*, asserts that President Bush doesn't put much importance, if any at all, on Homeland Security reports. Security spending has risen just four per cent since 9/11, and most of that increase was only to cover higher insurance programs. There are many chemical plants that have no fencing requirements, no cameras and no guards. He points out the spending needed to ensure the safety of US citizens and compares it (unfavourably) to the amount spent in Iraq over the same time period.

Three years after 9/11, almost anybody can still gain entry into thousands of chemical sites across the US. If a factory spends lots of money on security spending upgrades, its products can't compete with other factories that spend nothing. Only legislation can level the playing field.

(Source: *Mother Jones*, September/October 2004, <http://www.motherjones.com>)

Ethiopia is the latest US ally in the "War on Terror" to turn its back on its own indigenous peoples.